as reported in the 'Times of India' dated 16th April, 1996; and

(c) the corrective steps Government intend to take to see that households in rural parts of States of North India like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa etc. get an effective public distribution system like in Sourthern States?

THE MINISTER OF FOOD AND MINISTER OF CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI DEVENDRA PRASAD YADAV): (a) Yes, Sir the Study by National Council of Applied Economic Research is still in progress and has not been published yet.

(b) and (c) The Government is considering restructuring the Public Distribution System with focus on the poor. The proposal has been welcomed by the Chief Ministers in the Conference held on 4-5, July, 1996. It was further discussed at the State Food Ministers Conference held on 7.8.1996. Further details are being worked out keeping in view the suggestions of the State Governments.

For the successful implementation of Public Distribution System, both the Central Government and State Governments are responsible. The Central Government is responsible for procuring the commodities and making them available to the States. The States in turn are responsible for subsequent distribution of these commodities from the Central Agencies to the ultimate consumers through the network of Fair Price Shops, on the basis of family cards issued by them. While, therefore, the Centre makes allocation among the States, subsequent allocation within the State, scale of issue, prices at Fair Price Shops, coverage of rural and urban areas and the supervision of Fair Price shops, etc. are left with the State Governments. The State Governments have been requested to closely monitor the Public Distribution System at the Fair Price shop level. The Government is also taking steps to ensure that households in rural parts of the country including Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa get an effective Public Distribution System. Under the Plan Schemes, financial assistance is given to the States/UTs for purchase of vans and construction of godowns so as to ensure door step delivery of foodgrains in the areas inhabited by the poorer sections of the population.

Minimum wages for unskilled agricultural labour in Maharashtra

*353. MISS SAROJ KHAPARDE: Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that the unskilled agricultural workers are being paid half the minimum wages in the State of Maharashtra in comparison to Punjab and Haryana;

(b) if so, whether Government propose to advise the State Government of Maharashtra to enhance the minimum wages of agricultural workers in the State at par with Punjab and Haryana; and

(c) if not, what action Government propose to take to improve the lot of agricultural workers in Maharashtra?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (SHRI M. ARUNACHALAM): (a) to (c) The rates of minimum wages for unskilled agricultural workers fixed by the State Government of Maharashtra are substantially lower than the rates fixed by the State Governments of Haryana and Punjab. The respective State Governments being the appropriate Government under the Minimum Wages Act for establishments falling within their jurisdiction, the minimum wage rates under the Act are determined and fixed by the concerned State Governments. The need for evolving a suitable mechanism to protect the wages against inflation has been highlighted and impressed upon the State Governments from time to time in various fora and in different forms.